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ABSTRACT

With traditional enrollments declining, unless community colleges adapt to an increasing nontraditional population they may find themselves out of business. The 1977-1982 California Community College Five Year Plan indicates that nontraditional students, now the majority of community college enrollments, are often physically, economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged; that many are reentry women, minorities, prisoners, elderly, retired military personnel, and graduates of various higher education levels seeking vocational certificates or personal enrichment. Community colleges must be aware of their image to these older, taxpayer/consumers; they purchase their own education directly through taxes or fees and are more likely to disassociate from institutions that do not comfortably and adequately serve their needs. However, community colleges currently disregard the specific requirements of older students when designing publicity, application procedures, health and other services, and facilities. Unless colleges adjust their curricula, programs, procedures and services to accommodate older students, they will find themselves losing the estimated 11 million students over age 35 expected to be studying throughout the country in 1980. (TR)

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WHAT IF THE CONSUMER HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE?

by

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WHAT IF THE CONSUMER HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE?

Consumers of education at community colleges fall into two distinct categories, the traditional student, who arrives at this educational marketplace directly from high school, and the non-traditional student who is an older student entering the open doors a little later or much later. The 1977-1982 California Community College Five Year Plan describes some of the "non-traditional" students as physically, economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged. More specific accounting will include reentry women, minorities, inmates, and the elderly. Moreover, nontraditional education-consumer ranks are supplemented by retired military personnel and graduates of various levels of higher education, seeking vocational certificates for new updated classes for licensing requirements. Almost every health service provider has been affected by needs to update educational preparation.

The California Community College Five Year Plan reports that although we describe this group as "nontraditional," implying a deviation from the norm, in reality they are the <u>majority</u> of community college enrollments. Now engaged in direct service

to large numbers of older consumers, the community college must be aware of its image to these older taxpayer/consumers. Whereas traditional younger enrollees from high school are dependent, one generation removed from the taxpayer, older students purchase their own education directly through taxes or fees. The typical younger traditional student spends no more than two years at the community college before he transfers or earns a degree or certificate. The older student does not follow that pattern but returns year after year eclectically choosing from academic, vocational, personal growth, recreation, and retirement classes. Community service programs, or noncredit classes, attest to the large numbers of nontraditional students who participate in their services. Student attendance and attrition, efficiency of operations, student services, and faculty attitudes are now under constant scrutiny over a period of years by older student consumers.

Since the average worker, age 15 through 65, financially supports the rest of the population, inflation and rising costs have awakened him to cost accounting, quality control, and truth in packaging. (Appendix A) As in other markets, education can expect consumer reaction. Moreover, it is estimated that by 1980, 11 million students over age 35 will be studying for baccalaureate degrees at campuses throughout the country. Research foretells

that the largest population growth in California will occur in the age groups over 35. We must be aware that the older student, knowledgeable of the deflated value of his earnings, will critically appraise the value he receives for his tax dollar at the community college.

If we truly welcome an older audience, let us consider illustrations which indicate our present attitude toward him. Presbyopia is a physical condition of which we become aware as we reach our fortieth birthday. Symptoms include blurred vision and an inability to read small print. When preparing college catalogs, brochures, and forms, community colleges do not take this common condition into consideration. Furthermore, when the student is already enrolled there is a great deal of paperwork and procedure to facilitate his experience which is usually conducted in small print. (Appendix B)

Most health services do not include glaucoma testing, diabetes and blood pressure screening, common procedures for people over age 35. Except for minority outreaches, tutoring and learning centers are primarily career oriented. Older audiences need career change advice, vocational supplement jobs and classes in preparation for leisure and retirement.

It has been discovered that older people's eyes take longer to adjust from bright light to dark. It may therefore be extrapolated that older people attending night classes and leaving bright

classrooms for the subdued lighting of walkways and parking areas will be more subject to accident. These hazards to older people are dangerous to them and may also be costly to colleges if not corrected.

A major deterrent to older adult audience attendance is the size of the chairs. A weight table of adult men and women illustrates the difference between teenagers and sixty-year-olds in size. (Appendix C) Since most of our customers are older, we must change size 10 seats to accommodate size 14 bodies.

Referring once more to the 1977-1982 California Community College Five Year Plan, the declining enrollment predictions were based on declining birth rates, which began a generation ago, and the correspondingly declining number of high school graduates today.

The "nontraditional" student potential has not been assessed and evaluated with regard to declining enrollment. Some of the new potential students who contribute to the support of the college have neither been addressed or served by local community colleges.

Colleges can attempt to identify some of the deterrents in the present system which affect enrollment and continued attendance of nontraditional students. We <u>are</u> able to facilitate the process of applying, registering, enrolling, and scheduling classes. Expanding curricula is not the only response to expanding audiences.

I believe that the community college <u>does</u> meet some of the needs of nontraditional older students but, unfortunately, our

traditional methods of advertising, publicizing, and operating deter and often reject a large number of that audience from our doors. Many adults living within a few miles of community colleges are unaware of the classes, programs and activities for them. One reason for this restricted publicity is that community colleges themselves still foster the idea through their procedures that this format is styled for high school graduates.

Community colleges have already proceeded with many changes in response to the attendance of nontraditional students: evening classes, weekend classes, short-term classes, an increase in noncredit classes, extended degrees, an increase in the number of classes challenged by more experienced students, and an extension of off-campus activities. Nevertheless, the format for registering and advertising college activities are youth oriented so that essentially we are reaching a sophisticated portion of that audience already acquainted with the purpose of the community college and its procedures.

If one were to scan a typical community college catalog, he would find a traditional emphasis on academics, transfer courses and secondary emphasis on vocational certificates and terminal degrees. The explanations of programs and activities in the catalog are directed toward the high school student. In the introduction of catalogs one finds a description of sports

activities, health services and advice appropriate to recent high school graduates. Our physical education departments include classes for all age students but our athletic programs and competitions are segregated for the young.

Fundamental changes are called for in our college procedures. Perhaps two separate application forms will be necessary. It is an affront to an older student returning to the community college in order to take a course in ceramics, to be faced with four pages of application designed for the high school student. Questions which ask which parent the student is living with, the student's major subject area, academic records from previous schools, and peripheral information regarding student activities and honors, can be threatening to older students, the reentry women and those other nontraditional students not recently familiar with academic paperwork. In fact, questions regarding extracurricular activities and previous academic history reinforce the reentering older student's feeling that the campus is off limits to the mature student and he is thoroughly out of place in its environment. Mother's maiden name, father's occupation, source of financial support, athletic achievements, transcript and grade point average, plus a listing of all schools attended since eighth grade are other unnecessary items of information we collect from students enrolled in one or two enrichment courses.

The particular information we request of students to register for credit courses often resides in the remote memory of older students who have obtained higher degrees, traveled and worked during the last years. Our data banks contain much erroneous information supplied by impatient students of all ages, anxious to fill in the blanks and get to class. If this information is indeed necessary to the planners of higher education overall, I suggest that an assessment can be made on a random basis upon which we can predicate our future plans. Sometimes students will choose noncredit courses to avoid this discomfiture with paperwork. Many students go away and stay away. Presently there are three major cases at various stages of the court system. Each of these involves an older student. Bakke, who is suing the University of California, Davis, claiming reverse discrimination, is 37 years old. Charlotte Horowitz, over 45 years old, has brought suit against the University of Missouri Medical School for allegedly denying due process in her dismissal. Frances Turcie, at 52 years of age, has charged the University of Utah Graduate School with denying her admission due to her age. The older student consumer is already challenging the educational system. It is in our own best interest to anticipate consumer concerns before we are held to account.

At least 15% of Americans are over 60 years old. At least 60% of the men and 70% of the women aged 60 have not completed high

school. The new adult market can be greeted by educators and society as a welcome alternative to empty seats if educators will make efforts to attract that audience. Recently writing for the New York Times, discussing a winter survey of education, Gene I. Maeroff disclosed that the median age of college students has already reached 28 for those in the community colleges. Indeed, as Clark Kerr, Director of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies on Higher Education, has observed "the market is not only in the adults who never went to college, the greater market is among those already educated because the more education a person has, the more he wants." Retired people are discovering courses ranging from "Money Management and Pensions" to "Analyzing Society through Film." Since older students often view the dynamics of society from their cohert center of reference, this new interaction of young and old brings older students into the current mainstream of activity more closely aware of education and education's needs in financing.

We may face a backlash. The older retiring industrialist returning to school and observing us over a period of time, may view our enrollment procedures as anachronistic and feel that efficiency experts would advise our institutions to be more effective. Often traveled and experienced in world affairs, he may resist standing in lines to register or to buy books. As we attract a worldly audience we may have to adopt more sophisticated procedures. There has been an effort to expand curriculum for older

adults through emeritus programs to ease the reentry into education. However, it is quite possible that the classical credit courses would be just as attractive to this new audience were the processes eased. Among anxieties expressed by reentering women in a study by Beverly O'Neill, is the lack of understanding among the faculty. Since reentry women initially react and say "I can't do this," along with their basic belief that they are too old to learn, a disinterested faculty fosters these feelings. There are studies which demonstrate that with encouragement, the older student outperforms the younger.

There are major changes in higher education during the last ten years which do address special learning needs of older adults. Credit for life experience, independent study, off-campus locations, and other forms of flexibility have benefited students of all ages. Some institutions, however, remain untouched by these innovations, or segregate older adult programs so that they do not become a part of main campus activities. Student government at community colleges has been a placid vehicle over the years but older adults taking a more active part in the political scene will participate more to effect change.

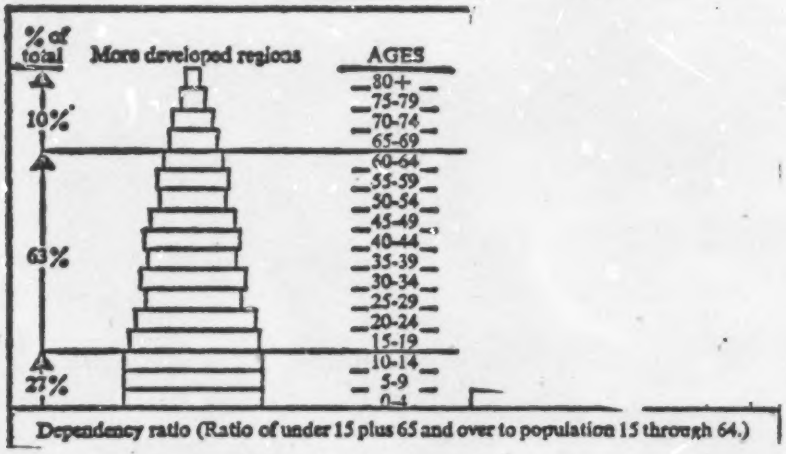
With the rising increase in population of people over 60 attending school, consultation with those in the new field of gerontology might be in order. It is good public policy, approved business practice and common sense to keep customers happy.

With traditional student numbers on the decline, unless the community college adapts to a new nontraditional audience with concern for both the producer and the consumer, they may find themselves out of business.

The military services, and police departments are among the most prominent institutions to respond to societal changes. Education as a life-long experience can not be addressed to the young alone or older consumers will revolt. The consumer in the education market does have alternative choices. He can even go into business for himself by setting up a new institution to serve his unique needs.

Appendix "A"

Age Structure of World Population in 1970 Source: United Nations.



Dependency ratio (Ratio of under 15 plus 65 and over to population 15 through 64.)

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